

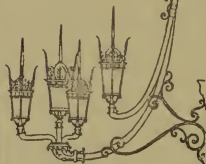
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# Fenway/Kenmore

## Open Space Plan 2000

Renewing the Legacy ... Fulfilling the Vision

**DRAFT**

City of Boston  
Parks & Recreation Department



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## **Fenway/Kenmore** **FENWAY/KENMORE**

### **The Setting**

#### *History*

#### *Environment*

#### **Geology, Soils, and Topography**

Like Central Boston and Back Bay/Beacon Hill, the Fenway/Kenmore Square neighborhood has been extensively modified by humans. Originally, the area was a broad, shallow tidal marsh, part of the Muddy River and the Charles River estuary. Today, the entirety of the neighborhood sits upon 15 to 30 feet of artificial fill, deposited from the 1600s well into the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

#### **Water Resources, Vegetation, and Fisheries and Wildlife**

The Charles River Basin provides water-related recreational opportunities and aquatic habitat. Fish ladders at the Charles River Dam allow some anadromous species to reach freshwater breeding areas, most notably Atlantic herring, which travel up through the Back Bay Fens and Muddy River as far as Leverett Pond each spring. The Basin is also an important feeding and resting area for wintering waterfowl.

The Back Bay Fens and Muddy River are also important natural resources for the neighborhood. The Muddy River itself, despite its current degraded condition, acts as a floodwater channel and provides important aquatic habitat. Lands adjacent to the River,

within the Riverway and Fenway, provide both wetland and upland habitat to many native species, most notably migrating songbirds in the springtime. The Boston Parks Department, in conjunction with other City of Boston agencies, the Town of Brookline, and the Mass. Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, is about to undertake a full-scale restoration of the Muddy River. This project, with a preliminary cost estimate of \$43 million, will address long-standing issues of sedimentation, polluted urban run-off, and degraded aquatic and riparian habitat by dredging accumulated post-industrial sediments and restoring native streambank plant communities. This, combined with a parallel project to separate storm flows from the Stony Brook conduit, is expected to greatly improve water quality, habitat viability, and aesthetic values along the Muddy River.

The Fenway and Kenmore communities date from approximately a century ago, created on the last land to be filled for neighborhood growth in Boston. In the latter half of the 1800s, the tidal swamps and mudflats at the confluence of the Muddy River and Charles River had become a sanitary concern due to the city's tremendous growth.

Frederick Law Olmsted addressed this concern, simultaneously solving a major drainage/sewage problem and creating a park system for the city, now known as the Emerald Necklace. Tidal gates were installed for the Muddy River and Stony Brook, a





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sewage interceptor was built below the Fens Basin, and the surrounding land was reshaped to create parkland. Park and streetcar development stimulated the westward expansion of Boston proper. The Fens parkland divided the area: Kenmore developed to the north and west; Fenway and Longwood developed to the south and east.

The neighborhood includes three distinct geographic areas with their own history and identity:

**Kenmore:** This western sector of the neighborhood is generally bordered by Beacon Street, the Brookline town line, the Allston-Brighton community, the Charles River and the Muddy River. Kenmore Square developed with fine hotels, shops and professional offices flanking the streetcar tracks. Close to the river on Bay State Road, townhouses were built for affluent families. The Peterborough and Audubon Circle areas had large apartment buildings along Beacon Street and the streetcar line. West of Kenmore Square, Commonwealth Avenue was slow to develop. Temple Adath Israel stood virtually alone following the turn of the century. Automobile showrooms started to line Commonwealth Avenue starting in the teens. Boston University purchased the last unbuilt tract of land in 1920 and raised the residential height limit, but did not begin to build the campus for another twenty years. Many extant buildings, including car showrooms, have been converted to campus and support facilities as well as housing. The Back Bay West/Bay State Road Historic District affords protection

by the city, as does the Landmark designation for Commonwealth Avenue Mall.

As in other parts of this neighborhood, in recent years there has been increasing development in the Kenmore area. Boston University has constructed class and administrative buildings and converted existing structures to university use, a new hotel is being built in Kenmore Square while some moderate-priced residential buildings have been converted to upscale condominiums.

**Fenway:** This is the central part of the larger community. It is generally bounded by Boylston Street, Massachusetts Avenue, the Southwest Corridor, Mission Hill and the Brookline town line. Brownstone and brick residences typify the Symphony area and apartment blocks form the streetscape along the Fenway parkway. Institutions including the Christian Science Center, the Massachusetts Historical Society, Symphony Hall, the Boston Medical Society (since relocated), Horticultural Hall, the New England Conservatory of Music, Simmons College and the Isabella Stewart Gardner House (now Museum) were built starting in the 1890s and early 1900s.

The Fenway also has experienced development pressures in recent years. A new Fenway Park for the Boston Red Sox is being planned, the former Sears building is being converted into offices, cinemas and other uses while in-fill housing has added population to an



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already densely settled residential community.

But a long-paved over portion of the Emerald Necklace in front of the former Sears building was reverted back to green space three years ago.

**Longwood:** The Longwood Medical Area, or Longwood, comprises the southern portion of this neighborhood. Bounded by the Riverway, the Fenway, Evans Way, Huntington Avenue and Fenwood Road, Longwood has developed a large institutional presence since the turn of the century. Notable facilities include Harvard Medical School, several major Boston-area hospitals and medical institutions, five schools including three colleges and Temple Israel. These facilities employ 26,000 people. Longwood has a student population of 10,000. The residential community here is mostly comprised of employees and students.

Building and development also continues apace in this area as area hospitals and colleges construct or seek additional facilities.

### **DEMOGRAPHICS/HOUSING**

From 1980 to 1990, the Fenway/Kenmore population grew from 33,228 to 35,574, a 7.1% increase versus a 2.0% increase for Boston as a whole. However, projections for the 1998 population indicate the count will be down to 34,510 persons, a decline of 3.0%.

Density is high as in all central Boston neighborhoods, 25,537 persons per square mile, compared to 11,510 persons per square mile city-wide. This density of the Fenmore/Kenmore neighborhoods may in part help explain the relatively high number of households that do not own vehicles – 61 % compared with 38% for all of the city – because there typically is less parking available in such built-up areas.

A high proportion of college students in the community is measure several ways. First, approximately 34% of the community lives in group quarters, including college dormitories, while the city-wide figure for this kind of housing arrangement is only 6%. And, non-family households comprise 47% of household types while city-wide this figure is only 28%. With the student presence so prominent here, it should come as no surprise that 53% of the community is aged 15-24 years and that the median age is 25.6 years, the lowest for any Boston neighborhood. City-wide, only 17% of the population is in the 15-24 age range and the median age is 32.8 years. Another 30% of the Fenway/Kenmore residents are in the 25-34 age group (compared to 19% city-wide); there are relatively few children or middle-aged or elderly residents.

The high student population is clearly indicated by the population that is enrolled in school. Only 5% of that group are in elementary through high school. However, the other 95% are enrolled in college. This high proportions of college students in the population also in part explains the



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estimated per capita annual income--\$16,240 compared to a city-wide per capita income of \$22,783--and the low residential stability. Two-thirds of the residents have lived in the dwelling place for less than two years. In terms of ethnicity and origins, the population is 52% white, 25% Asian, 15% African-American and 8% Latino.

Fenway/Kenmore had almost 13,680 projected housing units in 1998 with owner-occupied units comprising only 8% of the housing stock while the other 92% was rental, another reflection of the high proportion of housing there occupied by transient college students.

**THE OPEN SPACE SYSTEM TODAY****EQUITY AND INVESTMENT**

Fenway/Kenmore has 3.51 acres of open space for each 1,000 residents compared to 5.55 acres city-wide. Put another way, in this neighborhood 3.5% of Boston's public open space serves 5.6% of the city's population. To increase the amount of open space, future efforts must include private participation. For example, the developer of the former Sears property shall return the parking lot to the city for its reinstatement as the missing piece of the Emerald Necklace park system. Additional efforts can include public access to college and other institutional recreation facilities.

In the past five years, many agencies have contributed a total of over \$2 million in capital improvements for

public works (see table). City funds were provided through the Capital Plan and the Trust Office under auspices of the Parks Department, the Boston Redevelopment Authority, the Public Works Department, the Public Facilities Department (now Department of Neighborhood Development) and the Office of Neighborhood Services. Harry Ellis Dickson Park, completed this year, emerged from a former traffic island on Westland Avenue, through the coalition-building efforts of the Boston Fenway Program and the BRA. Other public agencies spearheaded various projects such as the MBTA's Kenmore Square improvements and DEMS Olmsted Program.

**ASSESSMENT**

Like Back Bay/Beacon Hill, this area has very few neighborhood parks and playgrounds. As noted above, most of its parklands and recreational facilities are located along the Charles River Esplanade (MDC), or within the Emerald Necklace parks of Commonwealth Avenue Mall, the Back Bay Fens and the Riverway. There are also some smaller parks in the Fenway and Longwood areas. The Commonwealth Avenue Mall, the Back Bay Fens and the Riverway are designated Boston Landmarks and are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

**Kenmore:** Usable public open space is limited to the Charles River embankment (a MDC reservation) and Commonwealth Avenue Mall. Some additional open space is provided by



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Boston University, with the Marsh Chapel plaza, connections and spaces between campus buildings from the river embankment to Commonwealth Avenue and Nickerson Field.

Beacon Street can benefit from improved landscape design and care at Audubon Circle. The Kenmore Square end of the Commonwealth Avenue Mall must continue to be maintained to a high level through the combined efforts of the MBTA, the community and the city. Extraordinary care, with the combined efforts of the MDC, the city and the community, must also continue to meet the needs of the very heavily used Charles River Reservation. Boston University can help mitigate the stress its student population places on the area's existing public parkland by offering maintenance assistance and also by providing general community access to its own recreational facilities.

**Fenway:** Open space in this area is dominated by the 78 acres of Back Bay Fens parkland. There are also some vest pocket parks and squares. But a major new green space is underway: A passive neighborhood park on Peterborough Street is being developed on a more than ½-acre site donated to the city.

This part of the neighborhood has strong access to one of the city's premier parks, the Back Bay fens. However, the city must equitably manage competing uses and assure that maintenance can address the wear caused by heavy use. Broad-based public/private capital investments will

be needed to continue to make improvements in the Fens. Community/institutional joint ventures are key to providing additional open space facilities such as tot lots or other recreational facilities within housing and institutional developments.

**Longwood:** The major open space resources near Longwood are the southern Fens and the northern Riverway. Smaller open spaces exist within the fabric of institutional buildings. Open space on member institutions' property is coordinated by MASCO, the Medical Academic and Scientific Community Organization, Inc. MASCO works closely with public agencies such as the Boston Parks and Transportation Departments to help provide an open space system with maximum public access to, from and within Longwood.

Several planning approaches are suggested in this densely-built area. Strengthening linkages from this area to the Emerald Necklace will be one important planning approach. This will also enhance the effort to make this area's streets green, more campus-like and livable for residential users. Linkages among open spaces within Longwood should be coordinated with the Emerald Necklace-linkage approach. Efforts should continue to be made to enhance existing plazas and small parks.

Enhanced cooperation and coordination among the interested parties—MASCO, its members, the surrounding Fenway and Mission Hill communities and the city administration





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itself – will help assure continued open space improvements in Longwood.

**Emerald Necklace:** Projects shall be implemented according to the guidelines in the Emerald Necklace Master Plan. Connections must be made to make the system more unified and legible as a whole to facilitate use, improve public safety and increase appreciation. Coordination by the Parks Department with city agencies such as the Landmarks Commission, community associations and Friends groups, the MDC and other non-city agencies and entities such as the Boston Fenway Program and MASCO will assure consensus for improvements in the Riverway, the Back Bay Fens and along Commonwealth Avenue Mall.

## **THE NEXT FIVE YEARS**

To mitigate pressures and stresses from high use, the Fenway/Kenmore area needs maximum protection and care of its precious existing open spaces. In the near term at least, the overuse and competing use of public parks can be diminished by access to existing private recreational facilities. In addition, development projects must include recreational components that serve neighborhood needs.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

- Work with various agencies and community groups to continue to rehabilitate existing park and open space resources. Follow city plans

including the Emerald Necklace Master Master Plan, the Emerald Necklace Sign Program, the Boston Art Commission's Adopt-a-Statue Program, and the BRA's Initiatives for West Boylston Street, Ramler Park on Peterborough Street, and McKinley School Playground. Support recommendation in Masco's open space plan for the Longwood Medical Area for which there is general community consensus. Work with groups such as the Boston Fenway Program and the Commonwealth Avenue Mall Committee to determine community priorities and to implement specific capital projects.

- The Parks Department shall encourage and coordinate public/private coalitions with institutions, community groups, businesses, and property owners regarding maintenance and programming for neighborhood open space resources.
- Improve connections to and between Emerald Necklace parks. In conjunction with the adjacent building re-development, return the Sears parking lot to city-owned parkland. Continue to reinforce the treatment of parkways as part of the



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adjacent parks. Continue to implement the Emerald Necklace Sign Program. Designate and mark bicycle paths in the Fens.

- Work with transportation agencies to use development and roadway projects to improve recreational connections and access, and to resolve conflicts between recreational users and automobiles, along the length and at both ends of the Fens. Participate in the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority's planning process for the disposition of Turnpike air rights, with the goal of improving park connections at the Bowker Overpass.
- Continue to enhance Boston Parks Department maintenance resources, especially for turf management, trees, understory plantings, routine care of park furnishings, and graffiti removal.
- Institutionalize care and planting of trees in the parks and along the parkways and streets. Use the Emerald Necklace Master Plan to create a planting plan for the Riverway and the Fens; use it as a shopping list for a plant-planting program. Plant trees in the Fens and the Riverway annually and follow-up with proper care for new trees; coordinate with the MDC parkway tree planting plan. Establish cyclical care for existing trees and understory vegetation including pruning. Remove dead trees.
- Seek cooperative agreements as well as alternative locations for additional publicly accessible play areas, ball fields, and courts, notably with colleges and hospitals.
- Work with the MWRA to reduce the CSO discharges to the Fens through the MWRA CSO Facilities Plan. Relocate the Proposed CSO drop shaft from the Fens to nearby non-park area.
- Coordinate city participation in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' project to assess the water resource problems of the Muddy River and determine the feasibility of various methods of treatment. Act as project liaison with the community and with advocacy groups such as the R.O.W. (Restore Olmsted Waterways) Coalition and the Friends of the Muddy River.

**COMMUNITY PRIORITIES**

- Continue and expand security efforts. Implement measures called for in the Emerald



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Necklace Master Plan such as lighting, bridge replacement, and call boxes or phones.

- In the Riverway and the Fens continue to cut phragmites (reeds) on a regular schedule to retain visibility and views and avoid further choking off of the waterway.
- Strengthen established community/city communications. Continue to review proposed capital projects through park partner and friends groups, neighborhood groups, open space organizations, and park user groups. Utilize the Emerald Necklace Advisory Board and park-specific task forces as community liaisons. Expand roles of existing community groups regarding extraordinary maintenance.
- Continue to implement rehabilitation plans for the Fens and the Riverway with an emphasis on restoring vegetation and water quality. Review all proposed work with the community and agencies with jurisdiction.
- Rehabilitate pathways, improve water quality, address security, and revegetate the Riverway. Continue the MASCO/Parks Department partnership to

implement master plan projects.

- Rehabilitate Fens pathways and Clemente Field. Address over-use issues without creating more active recreation. Remove graffiti from Clemente Field House and rehabilitate it. Address security problems especially at Mother's Rest, in the Victory Gardens, on Agassiz Road by the bridge, and at the basketball courts and Clemente Field. Remove snow from sidewalks bordering roadways. Designate quiet/passive recreation areas. Commit to plant trees annually. Develop signage program from bicycle safety. Install drinking fountains, such as at basketball courts, Victory Gardens, and Mother's Rest Play area. Pursue all avenues to improve Middy River water quality.
- Advocate for the MDC improvement of the Park Drive area Boylston Street, across from the Victory Gardens.
- Repair vandalized Lombard Light in Kenmore Square.
- Support the implementation of improvements proposed in the Boston Public Works Department Boylston Street



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plan, such as tree planting on the 1200 block.

- Support efforts by community groups, institutions, businesses, and public agencies to improve the image and appearance of Huntington Avenue, a major boulevard.
- Maintain and replace street trees throughout the neighborhood. Develop an Adopt-a-Tree program to enlist ongoing assistance from community residents, businesses, and institutions.





# DRAFT



## Fenway / Kenmore Open Space

- Malls, Squares & Plazas
- ▨ Parkways, Reservations & Beaches
- ▤ Parks, Playgrounds & Athletic Fields
- ▦ Cemeteries & Burying Grounds
- ▧ Community Gardens
- ▩ Urban Wilds
- ◻ Private Open Space



Prepared by Policy and Resource Development Unit  
City of Boston, Parks and Recreation

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